Cold (Beating) Hearts

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/70061446.

Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warnings:
Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings, Major Character Death

Category:
Gen

Fandom:
Dead Poets Society (1989)

Relationship:
Todd Anderson & Richard Cameron

Characters:
Richard Cameron, Todd Anderson

Additional Tags:
Angst, Angst and Hurt/Comfort, Mild Hurt/Comfort, Dead Neil Perry (Dead Poets Society), major character death is only in the past and refrences, Suicidal Thoughts, Sad, thats me im sad, Richard Cameron-centric, Richard Cameron Redemption, Kinda, Author is a Richard Cameron Apologist, Sympathetic Richard Cameron, Todd Anderson Needs A Hug, Literal Sleeping Together, thats my fav trope guys can u tell?, Implied/Referenced Suicide, Angst and Feels, Implied/Referenced Character Death, Heavy Angst, no beta we die like neil perry, Self-Esteem Issues, Self-Hatred, Hopeful Ending

Language:
English

Stats:
Published: 2025-08-30 Words: 2,321 Chapters: 1/1

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by absurddino

Summary

Todd Anderson stands in front of him, clad in the same style, too-thin pajamas Cameron is wearing. He must be cold as well, because he's got a sweater pulled on over them. Cameron doesn't have to ask to know it must be Neil's.

--
Or: Todd and Cameron both went back to empty dorms that day.

Notes

HIIII GUYSSS okay so when I said I would never write angst... that might have been a teenie tiny lie.

But okay, to be fair, this is NOT that heavy. Actually I think it's pretty mild? I guess?? I don't know. Still some trigger warnings: refrenced suicide, refrenced character death (Neil), self depricating thoughts, thoughts about death, generally a negative aura, probably used the same words a lot of times sorryyyy

A special thank you to Mori for posting this idea on tumblr and letting me write it. And also thanks to pepper, cere, tsuna, kvothe and anyone else that encouraged me to write this!

I do not appreciate any Richard Cameron hate. Don't like, don't read.

I hope you'll enjoy this and remember to take care of yourself <3

See the end of the work for more notes

The air is cold where it surrounds him. Thick like the thousands of blankets he's piled on top of himself. Dry like his throat, and his eyes after hours of sobbing into his pillow. Choking, like the breaths he takes, because choking breaths are better than no breaths at all.

Cameron is shaking. His eyes open, their faces painted on the dark ceiling above him. Filled with disappointment. And he doesn't know what to do with that. His head hurts from crying so much, he might not survive another fit. But he might not have a choice.

So he stares at the ceiling, at their faces. Fists clenched at his sides. It does nothing against his body's will, muscles contracting like they can't help themselves. Like they're the boss of him, instead of his own heart. Or rather, his own mind.

He doesn't know. It's late and it's cold and he wishes he could turn back time. Not because that would change things, but maybe because he… It's a road he doesn't want to go down. A road he *can't* go down.

It's silent as well. Silence. Something he once longed for, now seems like the end of the world. There's no soft sleepy breaths on the other side of the room. And somewhere out there… there is a boy, someone he considered a friend, who will never breathe again.

And now that he's hearing it. The awful silence, the debilitating nothingness. There is little he can do to make it go away. Everything is silence. The beating of his heart the only thing interrupting his thoughts.

It feels selfish. To have a heart that beats, when someone else's will never beat again. Someone with a much bigger heart than him, someone that used it for good while his own shriveled up and turned black and beat slower and slower until he wasn't really sure he was meant to be alive or dead.

But he's alive. A terrifying truth.

He knows, deep down in his bones, that it's wrong. His heart beat and the blood pumping through his veins. The dull pain that spreads across his face every time he shifts. The only reminder of a touch he'll never feel again.

At least he's got something to remember him by. Even though the pain will fade. It's a touch. A reminder. A parting gift of the boy he never truly understood, not fully. He forces himself to be grateful, because a

touch is something Neil will never have, not anymore.

A knock on his door. For a moment he thinks he must have fallen asleep and dreamt it. Or that it had been wishful thinking. His imagination coming up with cruel thing, one after the other.

Maybe Charlie returned.

He can't have. That punch… That— that was goodbye. He won't see him again. Not ever. That's the truth.

A truth which pales in comparison of the knowledge that *none* of them will see Neil again. Not the Neil they remember. They'll see him pale and dead in a coffin. Never smiling, never on stage, never clad in a white doctor's coat.

And Charlie… Cameron doesn't know what to do without him. He's never said it before, never expressed the words bubbling in his lungs. But he'd felt them. He'd felt the sweat on his palms and the fluttering in his stomach.

Charlie was rough and kind and funny and a bit annoying, but in this really addicting way that made Cameron want to bite him sometimes.

Gone. Not as gone as Neil, but he might as well be.

Neil didn't die hating him.

Charlie left with nothing else on his mind but *hate.* Hate and betrayal and the sting of his knuckles where they'd split. Another reminder. Cameron can't imagine him being grateful for it.

Another knock. Slightly louder this time. Longer than the last one, like the person at the door has no intention of leaving. Not until Cameron opens up for them.

And he supposes he's not doing anything else, anyway.

He heaves his tired, aching body out of bed. The blankets weighed heavy, but not heavier than his body does. Setting his feet on the ground and balancing his weight on his legs seems like a task too complicated for someone that sealed his own fate thinking he was doing the right thing and pushing away the person he loved most.

There's a lump in his throat. It might not ever leave him.

Maybe he doesn't want it to. It's nice to have another reminder.

Something permanent. Something that belongs to him, something that won't go away when the bruises and memories fade. Something he'll have to keep secret, just for himself. Something he might one day explain to someone, when they ask why his words don't come as easy as they used to.

He drags himself towards the door, placing his hand on the knob and just waiting for one moment. Breathing, if only because it would be selfish not to. He's alive. He's forced to be grateful, knowing Neil can't take another breath. No cold winter air. Not the scent of flowers or sweat or the grass after it rains.

It's late and he hasn't slept. He wouldn't be surprised if he'd open the door to Neil's ghost hovering in front of him. Near see-through, but there. A hallucination, maybe, or the veil between the dead and the living thinning out for one single moment. Long enough for him to feel the stab of pain through his chest from looking at his friend.

He wonders if Neil would be angry. He's never seen him angry before, but the excuse is there.

Vengeful spirits, and all that.

He opens the door. And it's not Charlie. It's not Neil. He's almost disappointed.

Todd Anderson stands in front of him, clad in the same style, too-thin pajamas Cameron is wearing. He must be cold as well, because he's got a sweater pulled on over them. Cameron doesn't have to ask to know it must be Neil's.

His face is red, jaw clenched.

They stay silent. Cameron doesn't know what to say. If Todd is here, he's here for one reason only. To make him pay.

He's sure of it. And he's okay with it, too. How could he not be. After all, everyone needs a punching bag. Someone to blame. He's happy to be that person for them. He's ruined enough. It's time for him to do something right.

And so he stands there. Stands and waits and hopes the punch will land just right. A bloody nose, an aching face. And maybe Todd wouldn't stop, not until he passes out. Not until he can barely breathe with how bruised his chest is. The closest he can get to feeling what Neil does, without becoming what he *is*.

It's cold. Colder now that he's left the confines of his blankets. Yet warmer than he's been in hours. The prospect of not being alone anymore is alluring, even though Todd might end him tonight.

It's fair, he supposes. Let Todd explode. Let the anger kill him. There's not going to be a day where he doesn't feel the cold of snow and loneliness seeping into his bones, anyway. He doesn't *need* to survive this.

But Todd just stands there. No anger on his face. Just the same fatigue Cameron feels. The one that runs deep. The one that's laced with sadness and guilt and fear. The one that won't ever leave again.

He's shivering. Shaking. It might not be the cold at all.

The silence stretches. Just like the hallway behind Todd. Long and winding and empty. Not for the first time that night, Cameron wonders what the afterlife is like. Whether it would be like the hallway, so seemingly endless. He hopes Neil won't be cold, when he reaches his destination.

The room might be spinning and for a moment he wonders whether this will be it. He's too tired to see clearly, he wouldn't be surprised at his body giving up on him altogether. He wants it to.

Maybe he can accompany Neil on his trip down the long, winding hallway towards heaven. If Cameron would even be headed there at all, with everything he's done, he wonders whether fate has decided to punish him more.

Time ticks by, his hands going numb and his vision going blurry. Because Todd is here and they've never really spoken one on one before —everything happened too quick, it's only the beginning of winter, *how is he supposed to live on like nothing happened?*— and now he's standing in front of him. Not saying a word.

He feels out of place in his own room. With Todd standing there. He tried to make things better once and he might have made a mistake, even though he still doesn't know exactly why. Everyone needs somebody to blame. Either him or Keating. Because they can't blame Neil. Not really. Not now he's dead and rotting and his parents are making funeral arrangements.

Not knowing nothing will ever be the same again.

There's nothing to say to make things better. Not really. He knows that

now, and still he finds himself saying the words,like he can't stop himself.

"I'm sorry," he whispers. Whether he breaks within minutes or hours, he doesn't know. All he knows is his feet are aching and he's so tired and Todd is looking at him like he might be lonely too and he doesn't know what else to do to make the unthinkable be something… less unthinkable.

He can't go back in time. He can't bring Neil back, no matter how much he wishes he could.

Sorry is a word that lacks meaning when one of your closest friends just died. Sorry is a stupid excuse for not doing the right thing. Sorry is nothing less painful than a fist to the face, Cameron should know.

Todd nods. Cameron understands. Not accepting the apology, maybe returning it without saying a word. Amicable, even though a snow storm rages on inside him.

He pushes the door open further. A silent invitation, because they've already said far too much. It's just that he's so lonely, and he sees Todd is as well and…

It's a stupid thought. How can someone not be lonely in this situation? Cameron certainly has no right to. But he is. And he will remain lonely, for the rest of his pathetic life. However many years God curses him to live.

And then after that. When everything around him stops and he will remain cold for all of eternity, it will haunt him then. Even in death. He *will* rot for what he did. For the people he pushed away. For the things he said and the things he didn't. It will all be a freezing cold reminder of the shame, the pain, he feels now.

Todd has his arms crossed over his chest, eyes searching the room like he's trying to gauge how much emptier his own feels.

Cameron is tired of feeling empty.

For now, anyway. Later, when he'll wake in the morning, he knows he'll find comfort in the feeling once more.

He just wants to sleep. Wants to sleep until it glues his eyes shut. Wants to never wake up. Wants to float in the feeling until he starves to death.

He sits down on his bed, folding the blanket back and sliding under the covers. It's cold. Everything's cold. His hands, his feet, his nose and his heart. His soul might be too, but it might have always been. He wonders whether he's ever felt warm before. He knows for certain that he's never felt colder, though.

It takes a moment for Todd to step forward, hesitating like Cameron has any right to kick him out now. He doesn't. Of course he doesn't.

Or maybe the hesitation is because he knows Cameron isn't… a friend. Isn't good, like the rest of them are. But then why had he shown up here? Of all places? He could've gone anywhere else, but he chose *him.*

Todd's movements are slow and robotic, like the cold has crept into his joints too. But he gets under the covers, lets Cameron drape them over him.

Their knees knock together and Cameron closes his eyes because he isn't sure whether he can look at Todd and still be *fine.* He hasn't been fine. Not since… He breathes. Finds that his breaths come impossibly easier now that he isn't alone.

Todd's face gets buried in Cameron's throat, who's arm comes up and wraps around Todd's back. It's… warm.

His heart beat feels a little less loud, now that there's another heart beating against his chest with it. Another boy. Real and solid beneath his hands.

They sleep. Quietly, they do. When he wakes in the night to Todd clutching his hands into the back of his pajamas and sobbing into his chest, he doesn't say a word. And when Cameron wakes from a nightmare with a barely contained gasp, all he gets is silence and Todd pulling him tighter against him.

They don't sleep. Not a lot. But every minute they get is more than they would were they alone.

Cameron isn't cold. He isn't empty. He isn't lonely. And that has to count for something.

And maybe he isn't forgiven. He probably won't ever be. But for tonight? There's someone that shares his pain. Someone that went to *him,* because he couldn't bear the thought of being alone.

It's something. He can't turn back time. He can't restart Neil's heart or

make Charlie return, but he can be this. He can play a role. He can be whatever they need him to be. And hopefully, winter will creep into spring and by the time summer rolls around, he'll feel a bit less cold. A little less empty.

End Notes

Leave kind comments and kudos if you enjoyed!!!

And just be nice to me, this is the first real angst I've posted, even though it's not THAT angsty... just... be nice, alright.

At first I thought I should add more dialouge, but it was actually really fun writing like this. I really enjoyed it. And I think it makes the impact of the two actual words much more... Impactful? Right, grim, words... Anyways.

I MIGHT write a second part to this if you guys want me to, because the thread on tumblr did not end here, if I remember correctly, but we'll see!

Writing this actually made me so sad, like genuinely. But that's alright, I also really liked writing something so far out of my comfort zone. It was a nice challenge.

Remember to follow me on tumblr
And also follow Mori's tumblr

Okay, I'll stop yapping now.

Goodbye, I love you!! - grim

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!